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ABSTRACT

Since communication education in nonacademic settings has emerged as an alternative career opportunity for a number of communication graduates, it is important that there be an understanding of the differences between teaching in academic and nonacademic settings. The major philosophical differences center on three issues: the first involves the nature of the teacher roles and learner roles which affect the type of relationship that is established in teacher-learner transactions; the second deals with the determination of the content of learning; and the third concerns the evaluation perspective that determines the criteria for judging the learning experience. Three basic needs are shared by students of communication in academic and nonacademic settings, but these needs must be approached differently for each group. The first need is for a language for talking about communication. Second, both groups need personal feedback on communication behavior, and third, both need concreteness and immediacy in learning new communication skills. The teacher in a nonacademic setting must have an understanding of the differences that exist and be able to meet the needs of the nonacademic learner. (JF)

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COMMUNICATION EDUCATION IN ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC SETTINGS

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Communication education in non-academic settings has emerged as an alternative career opportunity for a growing number of graduating communication students. As business, service and government organizations pursue educational objectives for their employees, more and more jobs become available which involve teaching people communication concepts and skills. The non-academic teaching option, however, requires a recognition and acceptance of some new values and approaches to teaching communication. There are, in fact, times when the values and beliefs that are the basis for success in a non-academic setting can be contrary to the values and beliefs held by those teaching in an academic environment. The purpose of this paper is to first explore some of the philosophical differences that seem to exist between academic and non-academic teaching situations. With those differences in mind, it will then be possible to look at some of the basic needs that must be met in order to successfully teach a communication program in a non-academic setting. It is my position that the values around teaching and learning held by teachers in non-academic settings are no better or worse than those held by teachers in academic institutions; the important point is simply that the values are appropriately different for the demands of each setting.

The major philosophical differences between academic and non-academic teaching situations center primarily on three key issues. The first and most primary difference involves the nature of the teacher and learner roles which consequently affect the type of relationship that is established in teacher-learner transactions. The second area of philosophical difference has to do with the determination of the content of learning, and the third area of difference is the evaluation perspective that determines the criteria for judging the learning experience.

As early as 1926 there is evidence of discussion of some of the differences between our academic system and adult learning outside that system. Edward Lindeman wrote in one essay:

> The approach to adult education will be via the route of *situations*, not subjects. Our academic system has grown in reverse order: subjects and teachers constitute the starting point, students are secondary. In conventional education, the student is required to adjust himself to an established curriculum; in adult education, the curriculum is built around the student's needs and interests.

Certainly Dewey's book, Experience and Education must be credited with stimulating a re-examination of learning from the perspective of the adult learner. Malcolm Knowles, whose several books on adult learning have contributed significantly to our understanding of adult education, has made heavy use of the term andragogy, or the education of adults as opposed to the education of children (pedagogy). Andragogy is the central theme of his book, The Modern Practice of Adult Education.

It certainly cannot be disputed that children learn differently than adults, and that the role of the teacher as well as the responsibilities of the learner ought to chang[illegible]om one level to another in our educational system as learners take on more [illegible] more responsibility for learning. When adults seek opportunities to learn, it makes sense to recognize the value of the experience they bring to the classroom, the applied focus they may have and also to facilitate the individual motivation for which the adult learner is usually willing to take responsibility. That does not mean, however, that it is always appropriate to apply adult learning values to all learning situations that may involve adults.

The academic environment, which certainly at the university level involves many adults, calls for a different set of teacher/learner roles than non-academic adult learning situations. The teacher in the academic environment makes the key content and teaching method decisions and also places him or herself in the role of judging whether or not students have learned what they are supposed to learn. There are certainly a great variety of styles that are used by academic teachers, but the important point is that the control or the decision to share control rests

with the teacher. If the learner has any power over content, method of teaching or evaluation, it is because the learner has been given the opportunity to influence the learning experience by the instructor. The teacher/learner transactions in an academic environment tend to be more "top-down" with the learner being in a more passive role than in non-academic teaching situations.

The type of learning situation that calls for teaching adults in a non-academic setting puts the teacher and the learner in different roles. These situations for learning exist because the learner either wants or needs help in a particular area, and in a sense, the learner can exercise more consumer power than the learner in the academic setting. The non-academic learner is usually not going after a degree which represents knowledge of a commonly recognized discipline. This learner is going after specific knowledge and skill in small learning segments that can be applied immediately to his or her organizational environment. The learner wants and needs, rather than the teacher's preference, are the starting point for making content, method and evaluation decisions. The non-academic adult learner is also more active in selecting out information irrelevant to him or her and focusing in on only those things that apply to his or her concerns. Consequently, evaluation is not usually based on whether the topic was completely covered and learned, as much as it is a function of how much the learner feels that the experience was useful. The role of the teacher in both academic and non-academic settings is to share the information that the teacher has as subject matter specialist and to be the gatekeeper of other information resources on the subject. How the teacher does these things, however, depends upon whether the values held by teachers and learners support a teacher centered or a learner centered approach to learning situations. The implications of these values also affect the curriculum decisions, which is a second major area of difference between academic and non-academic teaching situations.

Decisions about curriculum and course content are based largely on three factors in an academic environment: the choice and subject matter specialty of the

teachers, the historic divisions of subject matter, and the goal of wanting to cover a particular body of knowledge in a logical, sequential way in order to fit the institutional structure demands. The wants and the demands of the learner are clearly given a lower priority, although many academic institutions are responding to learner wants by offering special general offerings that can be taken in addition to program requirements. Attempts at trying to meet "consumer demand" within the walls of an academic institution, however, tend to confuse the goals of the institution. One of the outcomes of an academic institution is to provide meaningful certification that an individual has completed the study of a recognized discipline. Curriculum and course content choice must be consistent enough to give the degree meaning which results in adherence to a consistent curriculum and course content despite variance in learner needs.

In a non-academic learning situation, there tend to be three major determinants of course content. The choice and subject matter specialty of the teacher is still a factor in course content decisions, but in the non-academic situation, the learner wants and learner needs are two additional factors affecting course content. The non-academic teacher of adults is free of curriculum consistency pressure. Rather than a degree, the adult learner in the non-academic situation is searching for learning experiences that satisfy immediate types of concerns. These learners want to know how they might try to resolve current interpersonal or intergroup conflicts. They may be pursuing an effective presentations course because they believe that improving that skill will improve their position in the organization. Immediate application to solve salient problems is the primary learning goal.

Within the non-academic teaching arena, the requirements of doing needs analysis takes on a great deal of significance. This type of teaching requires learner wants and needs as key determinants of course content, which also requires that the teacher do everything possible to understand the learner. People who teach in non-academic settings vary in the degree of emphasis they place on wants

and needs of the learner. There are those who teach primarily what the learners say they want to learn, which may result in simply reinforcing the learner's existing knowledge, skills and values. The greater challenge lies in trying to determine what competencies, knowledge and values are critical for improved performance or improved team effectiveness and then trying to design the learning experience to cover those identified needs. It is not uncommon for learner wants and learner needs to be contradictory, which makes teaching in this context extremely complex.

The final area of major difference between the academic and non-academic learning situations involves evaluation of learning. The term "academic standards," which generally refers to the central evaluation criteria for learning in academic institutions, implies that evaluation of what and how well the subject area has been learned is not to be determined by the learner for him or herself. The testing and grading methods used in most academic institutions reflect the value that some type of consistent standard of evaluation ought to be used that originates from those who have determined course content and curriculum. This is an appropriate value given the goals of the academic situation.

The non-academic situation, by contrast, calls for pursuing a different form of evaluation. Since the course content decisions are based on learner wants and needs, it follows that evaluation ought to be based on progress against learner wants and needs. The learner must determine to what degree his own wants have been satisfied and a combination of methods might be used to observe progress against identified needs. In general, there is a sharp contrast from the notion of "academic standards" in the non-academic teaching situation. The learner centered values prevail over institution or teacher centered values in influencing evaluation of learning in the non-academic context.

With the value differences between these two learning contexts in mind, it is now appropriate to discuss some of the basic needs that must be met in order to successfully teach a communications program in a non-academic setting. These needs will be discussed in contrast to how they might be treated in an academic

communication course. There are three factors that I will focus on:

1. The need for a language to talk about communication.
2. The need for personal feedback on communication behavior.
3. The need for concreteness and immediacy in learning new communication skills.

One of the most significant difficulties people in organizations face when it comes to communication problems is the fact that they have trouble identifying the dynamics of the situation. Without a way to talk about the communication problem, or metacommunication skills as Jackson Watslawick and Beavin would call it, it is impossible to solve the problem. The existence of a need for a language to talk about communication accounts for the popularity of Transactional Analysis. Those who have written on T.A. have taken a familiar set of relationship terms (parent, adult, child) and applied them in a way that helps people understand more about the relationship messages inherent in all of their behavior. The success of the analogy clearly indicates that there was a conceptional vacuum being experienced by most people in that area. There are many other languages to describe communication style that are used in non-academic courses. Blake and Mouton's Managerial Grid and its many variations, and Wilson Learning Center's "Managing Interpersonal Relationships" style model represent some typical examples of models and language designed to help people in organizations identify and talk about the dynamics of their communication.

There is a point, however, when the non-academic learner reacts negatively to the introduction of new labels and terms. As soon as the learner feels a sense of diminishing value toward new terms for the purpose of identifying and discussing communication, he or she will probably reject the new models and language as "academic jargon."

The need for a language to talk about communication in an academic environment is distinctly different from the needs of the non-academic learner. At the same time that some non-academic learners are judging over-emphasis on terms and models

as "academic jargon", there are some academic learners who are displaying disdain for the gross distinctions and shallow analysis of "popularized" versions of communication concepts. This rift has its basis in a difference in purposes. The academic learner needs models and language for describing communication that refines observation and sharpens theory. The non-academic learner's needs are focused on what has personal use, which usually results in less attention to detail and refined distinctions.

The need for personal feedback on communication behavior is a second area of need for the non-academic learner in a communication program. The participant in the non-academic program enters the learning experience with a learning want or need that in most cases is unique to that person's personal life. Since the adult learner in this situation is attempting to address personal communication needs, general or theoretical discussion of communication by itself is not very satisfying. Theory is an acceptable means to personal understanding, but there is no mistake about the nature of the final outcome for the non-academic learner. The communication program'ssuccess or failure is highly dependent on how much the participant in the program has learned about his or her own communication competence.

In an academic communication program, the emphasis is usually on learning about communication from a detached perspective. There are a number of experiential and personal feedback learning opportunities in communication programs in academic settings, but I believe it is fair to say that the primary emphasis in an academic environment is on studying communication phenomena and theory in as objective a manner as possible. This emphasis is, once again, appropriate with the goals of an academic institution. Attempts to turn academic communication course offerings completely over to personal growth objectives would violate the unique contribution to our understanding of communication that our academic communication departments provide. Academic communication programs in valuing a research oriented, personally removed study of communication, represent a sharp contrast to the personally involved applied orientation of the non-academic learner.

The difference in these orientations must be respected in the design and teaching methods used in both academic and non-academic communication programs.

Some of the types of personal feedback on communication behavior that the non-academic learner might be looking for include:

. How well do I understand the communication problems that I'm experiencing

. How am I "coming across" to those I work with

. What are the implications of my communication style

The popularity of questionnaires and surveys that are filled out by others on the communication style of the program participant is evidence of a need for feedback that most non-academic learners have.

The third need that many non-academic adult learners have that is relevant to communication programs is a need for concreteness and immediacy in learning new communication skills. A consistent theme for the non-academic adult learner running through all of these needs is a need for an applied perspective. Theory, language and abstract concepts are valuable only according to whether or not they lead to something the learner can apply to him or herself or the environment. The skills that are learned must be discrete enough to have immediate use. Knowledge that is retained in this type of learning situation is remembered primarily because of how well it explains and helps the learner analyze a salient concern. The non-academic learner is usually not pursuing theory or concepts for their own sake or for their heuristic value. This type of learner evaluates a communication program based on a standard of how much of what he or she has learned can be used.

In academic communication programs, the applied orientation is complemented with the study of communication concepts and theories for their own sake. The student demands in the 60's for "relevance" of course learnings caused many of our academic institutions to try to justify the usefulness of their course offerings. This knee-jerk reaction begs the question on academic learning goals. A utilitarian philosophy is not the proper evaluation screen for looking at academic programs, and in fact, the freedom to pursue research questions without utilitarian justification

is what makes the contribution of academia so valuable to our knowledge of subject matter areas such as communication.

The need for a language to talk about communication, the need for personal feedback on communication behavior and the need for concreteness and immediacy in learning communication skills are only three needs that seem to characterize what learners attending non-academic communication programs are looking for. It seems clear that communication programs taught in an academic environment cannot simply be transplanted to non-academic teaching situations. The teacher/learner role values, the content and program design philosophy and philosophy for evaluating learning in each of these contexts makes the transition from one environment to another much more complex than it may seem on the surface.

The professionals who teach in both of these learning contexts have a great deal to say to each other and have a great deal to learn from each other. Those who teach communication in non-academic environments represent a relatively new profession that needs to develop and mature. That profession ought to be viewed and respected as a type of teaching profession that calls for knowledge, values and competencies that are different than those of the academic communication educator.

At the same time, we need to respect the role of the communication scholar and the academic environment that encourages that type of learning. Emerson, in his 140-year-old essay on "The American Scholar" affirmed the social role of the American scholar. He believed in the American scholar's capacity and obligation to participate in the life of action; to join the study of the past with practice in the present. We need to have a place to research, study and better understand communication phenomena as well as practice applications of our knowledge and skills "in the present." The best way to pursue and maintain excellence in both academic and non-academic communication education is to move toward a better understanding of each setting and its impact on the learners in both contexts.

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